

.....
A LIFE LESSON
.....

By Irene Beatrice Proctor

(Copyright by W. G. Chapman.)

"Work at last."

The man who uttered the words spoke in a satisfied way, yet face and manner showed a wearied, stolid undertone.

He was known in the modest boarding house as Cecil Wayne, but that was not his name. Nor were the bearded face appendages becoming to him. He wore them as might a man a disguise, because he had a deep secret to conceal, because he feared that after two years some one might stop him on the street and say sternly:

"You are Ronald Warne!"

For he was a man hunted, despised, tabooed, his tortured soul told him fifty times a day. After sojourning, almost in hiding, in a desolate part of Western Canada, he had stolen back to his native country to die, he hoped, for life held no comfort for him, no prospects no ambition.

"The past—dim gulf!" he breathed bitterly, "I hoped to forget, but I never can. Work—work at last! It may help me to keep remorse at bay, at least in my waking hours!"

Ronald Warne, alias Cecil Wayne! How had it come about that this man had two names? His quick haunting memory explained all too vividly. His thoughts went back two years, he a roving and dissolute artist, in love with a humble but beautiful girl, the daughter of the townsman on the Central railroad near Bridgeton.

For the first time in his roving life Ronald Warne had loved. The sweet, innocent maiden he had wooed, Elsie Barker, knew nothing of his drinking habit. Under the spell of her fascination he had honestly tried to reform. Then one night, one dreadful night—

He had met her father in the little village, an easy-going old man, on his way to go on night duty at the tower

one mile east of the big railroad bridge. He was with some friends and the old man, having an hour to spare, accompanied them to the drinking place they were bound for. His weak nature soon succumbed to the influence of the unfamiliar liquor. When it was time for him to go on active duty Mr. Barker was in a sodden state of intoxication.

Warne grew grave and self-reproachful as he noted the result of



"The Past—Dim Gulf! I Hoped to Forget!"

his recklessness. He feared what Elsie might think of him if she discovered this flagrant dereliction from manhood and respect. The townsman was in no condition for duty, yet some one must take the signal post for the night and Ronald called one of his friends aside as an idea came to his mind.

"See here," he said "I count on you to keep the old man away from the public street and home till he is sober."